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Stewart becomes a pop-rock troubadour

JOHN STEWART
Another Hollywood album

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
of The Gazette

ALBUM of the week

John Stewart started his career anonymously enough as the final member of the Kingston Trio, but has more than made the transition from popularized "folk" music to a personalized brand of country rock.

Now he's evolved to a sleek, romantic pop-rock sound highly reminiscent — with its vocal harmonies and stylized guitar layers — of Fleetwood Mac. With **Dream Babies Go Hollywood** (RSO), Stewart should pass from cult hero to star.

Sure enough, it's yet another album about Hollywood, in line with the Eagles, Warren Zevon and the other Sunset Boulevard cowboys. And it conveys the cool Los Angeles romanticism as portrayed by Fleetwood Mac, not to mention the familiar production techniques that create the ethereal sound.

The album features vocal harmonies orchestrated by Wendy Waldman and featuring the likes of Linda Rondstadt, Nicolette Larsen and Phil Everly.

However, it's very much a John Stewart album. His is a more straight ahead brand of romanticism — there's a lot less navel-gazing. Stewart is a more poetic wonderer than, say, Stevie Nicks.

He genuinely *contemplates* his *Lady of Fame*: "She sounds like birds, flying in the moonlight/She feels like fog covering your eyes". In *Wind on the River*, "She's as golden as the jewels of a Hollywood fool".

He sings of *Moonlight Riders* and *The Nightman* and *Wheels of Thunder*. He contemplates ships out of Monterey harbor and *(Odin) Spirit of the Water*.

His vocals are that of a troubadour — somewhat stern, rugged, brooding — backed up by a surprisingly effective folk-cum-electric strumming style that has quite a sting. The production is in the mellifluously mixed tradition of the Hollywood romantic school, not as clean but more dense with atmosphere.

Stewart, who recorded with Lindsey Buckingham of Fleetwood Mac, has obviously learned all the tricks and *Dream Babies Go Hollywood* is without a doubt in the same quality league as Mac, Eagles, Jackson Browne and the rest. Turn it up loud and it's quite exhilarating; play it soft and it's exquisite.

'Madness' now a feature film

Hollywood — (UPI) — *Divine Madness*, the Bette Midler one-woman show that set box-office records on Broadway and in Los Angeles, has been filmed by The Ladd Company as a feature motion picture. Michael Ritchie produced and directed the movie at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium, where Midler performed before 10 cameras on four consecutive nights with a Los Angeles audience.

Midler will be the sole performer to be seen on the screen during the film which clearly is directed to the singer's raucous style.

Robert Gordon spins out rockabilly classics

Robert Gordon continues to mine the rockabilly vein

SPINOFF

Are you tired of plunking down $7 or $8 of your hard-earned money for an album that turns out to be a stiff? Maybe this guide can help. These are some of the best — and worst — LPs *The Gazette* has reviewed in recent weeks.

Bad Boy — *Robert Gordon* (RCA): Gordon's lastest release continues to mine the same rich rockabilly vein that he embarked on two years ago. Backed up by Chris Spedding, Rob Stoner, Howie Wyeth and Tony Garnier, Gordon spins out a well-balanced collection of rockabilly classics and lesser-known numbers with loving attention to detail and obvious respect for the originals.

Five O'Clock Bells — *Lenny Breau* (Posterity): Breau's lastest album proves that he is one of the most original jazz guitarists around. *Bells* is a solo tour-de-force featuring warm and imaginitive sounds.

Get Happy!! — *Elvis Costello* (Columbia): In an outstanding long player, Costello and the Attractions deliver 20 brand new songs in a short, punchy format. An inventive work in which creativity does not flag through almost an hour.

Fun and Games — *Chuck Mangione* (A & M): Mangione's latest album reflects the happy, spring feeling of a man at the peak of popularity. Includes the theme song of the XIII Winter Olympics as commissioned by ABC-TV. Well-produced.

Yellow Magic Orchestra — *Yellow Magic Orchestra* (Horizon-A & M): Electronic music created by the Japanese trio and associates. Parts of the album feature striking, finely textured sounds, but much of the actual musical composition sounds as if it was meant for robots to disco to.

Chansons dans la memoire longtemps — *Felix Leclerc* (Polydor): Leclerc's best-known songs re-recorded on three records, issued in a box set or separately. Although the new arrangements by Francois Dompierre are a bit too rusty, the set is a fine collection of nuggets conveying the heart of traditional Quebec.

B.B. Gabor — *B.B. Gabor* (Anthem): An overly clever debut disc by a Toronto guitarist who seems to have assimilated many pop-rock styles but doesn't have all that much to say. The songs and the performance are in the **10 CC** vein but not nearly as well done.

Don't Fight It — *Red Rider* (Capitol): Debut album for a five-member Toronto-based band which has the potential to make an impact on the pop market. Recorded in Hollywood, the album features 10 uniformly slick, uptempo rockers; and the LP has already spawned a single — **White Hot** — that is getting considerable airplay.

Mad Love — *Linda Ronstadt* (Asylum): **Mad Love** represents a dramatic re-direction in Linda Ronstadt's career. Gone are the bittersweet vocals that became her trademark in the 70s. Ronstadt gives free rein to the hard-rocker in her soul and comes up with a high-energy performance, ably backed up by a hard-working band that includes Mark Goldenberg of the Cretones and Little Feat alumnus Bill Payne.

Bad Luck Streak in Dancing School — *Warren Zevon* (Asylum): A super slick production. Unfortunately, what Zevon and his cohorts are saying is not nearly as apocalyptic as they make out. Too little too late.

End of the Century — *The Ramones* (Sire): The magic of legendary record producer Phil Spector's style has always been his belief in providing his acts with emotional "depth" by surrounding them in a wall of sound that seems bottomless. It works for about half of this album, including a remake his Ronettes' hit, *Baby, I Love You*.

Soldier — *Iggy Pop* (Arista): Despite the promise of his last comeback album, *New Values*, 1960s-survivor Iggy Pop has slipped into his old fatigues and seems to have a hard enough time singing, let alone sounding outrageous. Stale, neurotic nonsense only a shrink should hear.

London Calling — *The Clash* (Epic): The Clash's third LP may well be one of the greatest to ever grace rock 'n' roll. Listening to this two-record set is like digesting Marx, Trotsky, Buddy Holly and the Beatles in one gulp — an extremely potent brew.

After Dark — *Andy Gibb* (RSO): The youngest of the Gibb brothers has come up with a collection of romantic numbers and some sophisticated music-making in a highly-refined album, produced by the Bee Gees, naturally.

Malice in Wonderland — *Nazareth* (A & M) The veteran hit-making rock group's 10th album delivers songs about burnt-out fantasies, nightmares gut-wrenching ballads and foot-stompers. After a dozen years of rocking, the group sounds like it has plenty of juice left.

Bebe le Strange — *Heart* (Epic): A classic example of a group wearing thin their own cliches. There's nothing original in this album. The anguished wailing of Ann Wilson sounds like a mindless imitation of Janis Joplin, sister Nancy plays extremely ordinary heavy rock guitar cliches and the rest of the band is plain cumbersome.

Tieme — *Veronique Sanson* (Elektra): Using the largest rhythm, string and horn sections of her career, the French *chanteuse* delivers a fine display of her considerable musical talents. Her style comes as a breath of fresh air.

The Pleasure Principle — *Gary Numan* (Beggar's Banquet/WEA): Weird, hypnotic repetition uses synthesized sound to reach listeners on a visceral level. Dull at first listen, Numan's second LP grows on you.

Bolero — *Tomita* (RCA): Japanese synthasizer whiz strives to portray music as if it were being played by human beings. In this treatment of Ravel's classic, Tomita succeeds.

Angel of the Night — *Angela Bofill* (Arista): There are flaws — notably, simplistic lyrics — but the second album from this New York Hispanic jazz singer offers ample evidence of a monster talent. Tasteful arrangements and production, plus a cookin' band, provide an apt setting for Bofill's vocal magic.

Sidewalks, Fences and Walls — *Solomon Burke* (Infinity): An erstwhile great soul singer attempts disco with little feeling or enthusiasm and the result is a pale imitation of Barry White.

Back on the Right Track — *Sly and the Family Stone* (Warner Bros.): Sly's umpteenth comeback sounds little different from his sputtering efforts of the 70s. The music here lacks toughness and edge; there is nothing to remind listeners of the halcyon days of the band.

Broken English — *Marianne Faithfull* (Island): Back from drug addiction and obscurity, Mick Jagger's former girlfriend is no longer Miss Swinging London. Faithfull growls, snarls and spits out bleak images against a hard-driving rock band ... hardly *As Tears Go By*, but fascinating listening.

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